

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:

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Please replace the first full paragraph with the following amended paragraph:

If time slots 1, 2 and 3 are dropped in the OC-48 frame shown in Fig.—2__3, and populated with data for an OC-3c, however, they could not be switched by current SONET equipment because they are not transmitted in a sequence conforming to the concatenation protocol described above. Rather, a conventional SONET network element would need to be reconfigured to thereby rearrange the remaining time slots so that a new OC-48 frame is created which does conform to the standard concatenation sequence. If reconfiguration is not performed, the empty time slots cause bandwidth fragmentation.